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Partnership with Ukraine celebrated

By Tony Martin
Associate Editor

The Missions Mobilization Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) hosted the annual Missions Mobilization Celebration on November 12-13 at First Church, Jackson, marking the "official" end of Mississippi Baptists' partnership with Ukraine.

Two special guests for the weekend were Grigoriy Kommendant, president of the Ukrainian Baptist Union, and Vladimir Shemchishen, president of Odessa Theological Seminary and pastor of Illichovsk Church, both in Illichovsk, Odessa.

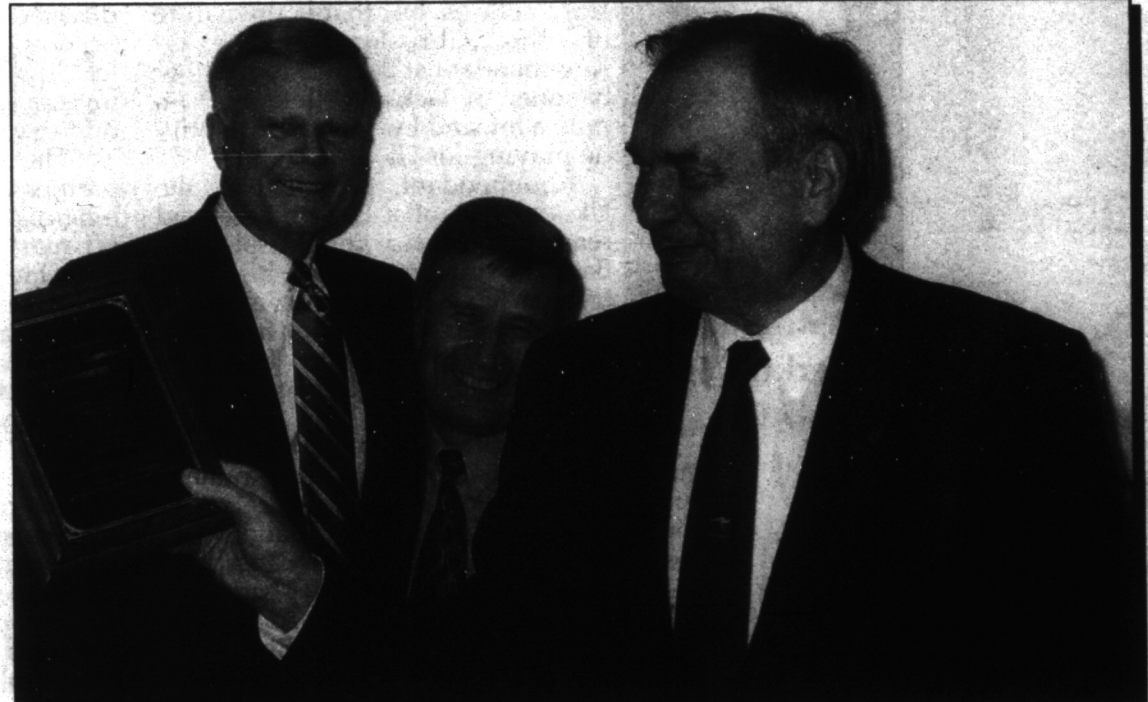
The Mississippi Singing Churchmen provided music, performing some of their pieces in Russian. The Churchmen, composed of Mississippi Baptist ministers of music, have toured Ukraine during the partnership period.

"In 1997, Bill Causey (MBCB executive director-treasurer at the time) got a letter from Dr. Kommendant, asking him to visit Ukraine," said Missions Mobilization consultant Paul Harrell. "In the spring of 1998, Dr. Causey went to Ukraine and heard Dr. Kommendant's heart. He went to Odessa and met Vladimir (Shemchishen), a young pastor, who saw opportunities for new church starts.

"That's how the partnership began. Most partnerships last three years; this one has been going on for six."

During November 12 evening banquet at First Church, Jackson, Kirby and Linda Smith, coordinators for volunteers to the Odessa region in Ukraine, shared testimonies. "We had the best of two worlds," said Linda Smith. "Not only did we get to live and serve in a country like Ukraine, but we were able to have home folks come, so we didn't get so homesick."

"The International Mission Board gave us the opportunity to be in Ukraine,"



PARTNERSHIP'S CLOSE — Grigoriy Kommendant (right), president of the Ukrainian Baptist Union, receives a plaque from Jim Futral (left) executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, celebrating the six-year partnership between Mississippi Baptists and Ukraine. Joining them is Vladimir Shemchishen, president of Odessa Theological Seminary in Ukraine, and pastor of Illichovsk Church. (BR photo by Tony Martin)

Linda Smith continued, "and we couldn't be there without our American brothers and sisters who worked alongside us."

"May God bless America," said Kommendant, speaking through an interpreter in his opening remarks at the banquet. "Thank you, Mississippi Baptists, for giving of yourselves."

"I know you pray a lot," Kommendant continued, "and I want you to continue to pray for Ukraine. There was rejoicing six years ago when we began this partnership, and I want to believe that the partnership will not end. I know we are anticipating working with Alabama and others, but thank all of you who have come to Ukraine."

"I know you have had joy and tears with us," Kommendant said, "but that is the nature of our Christian life."

"More than 850 years, Ukraine was under the rule of the Czars," he continued. "Now, we have had freedom for 13 years. In those 13 years, 1,700 churches have been opened. During those six years of partnership with Mississippi, there have been 800 churches started."

"There have been thousands and thousands of Ukrainians suffering without freedom but now, there has been a great harvesting. So many states have sent teams to help us."

"Once a volunteer offered candy to a Ukrainian boy. The boy asked his mother, 'What should I say?' His mother said, 'Tell him thank you — and give me more.' So, Mississippi Baptists, thank you — and we need you! My father and grandfather sowed in tears, but now we see the harvest."

Vladimir Shemchishen shared the evening message, using Philippians 1:1-6 as his text.

"Paul talks about partnerships," Shemchishen said. "If we are partners, then we are to carry the Gospel together."

"God calls us to be witnesses. Children of God grow up to be adults who serve Him. God said that one who is in Him will bear much fruit. God created us to be such creatures to give love as a representation of His love. He wants us to give a helping hand to everyone who is suffering for His name."

"The partnership between Mississippi and Ukraine is a fulfillment of Jesus' command. Mississippians have seen how Ukrainians of all ages have come to receive Christ. They have seen how people cry when they receive Jesus. We have seen God's hand in opening new churches."

"At the beginning of our partnership, we knew there were thirty villages that didn't even have a church. Then you came and shared the Gospel, and now each of those villages has at least one church, sometimes two or three. It is a blessing from God, but people who brought this victory were the people of Ukraine."

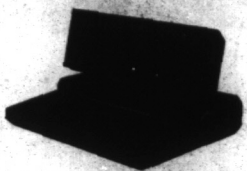
The work of the Missions Mobilization Department is funded by gifts to the Margaret Lackey State Missions Offering and the Mississippi Cooperative Program.

For more information on Mississippi Baptist volunteer missions opportunities, contact Missions Mobilization Director Ken Rhodes Ken Rhodes at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3398 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 398. E-Mail: krhodes@mbcb.org.

MESSAGE FROM UKRAINE
— Vladimir Shemchishen (left), president of Odessa Theological Seminary in Ukraine, brings the message at the Missions Mobilization Banquet at First Church, Jackson, on November 12. Shemchishen's daughter Olga Moffett served as his interpreter. (BR photo by Tony Martin)



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A mighty partnership for Jesus

Mississippi Baptists gathered in Jackson last month with our Baptist friends from Ukraine to mark the closing of one of the most successful and long-running missions mobilization projects in the history of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

Their names may be a little different from most of ours — Gregoryi Kommendant, Vladimir Shemchishen, and the many others who immersed themselves in the six-year partnership with Mississippi Baptists — but we have come to know them and love them as our brothers and sisters in Christ who share our singular vision to bring the world to Christ.

"I know you have had joy and tears with us, but that is the nature of the Christian life," said Kommendant at the mid-November banquet in Jackson. "I know you pray a lot, and I want you to continue praying for Ukraine."

Kommendant, president of the Ukrainian Baptist Union, has good reason to plead for Mississippi Baptists' prayers. He and his countrymen have struggled mightily to cement their newfound freedoms since they broke away from the Soviet Union and became an independent country in 1991.

In addition to years of internal intrigue and Russian meddling, Ukraine is currently embroiled in a national election controversy involving rigged ballots and the poisoning of the opposition candidate.

"In those 13 years (of independence), 1,700 churches have been opened. During the six years of partnership with Mississippi, there have been 800 churches started," Kommendant observed.

Vladimir Shemchishen, president of Odessa Theological Seminary and a bivocational pastor, told the Jackson audience, "The partnership between Mississippi and Ukraine is a fulfillment of Jesus' command. Mississippians have seen how Ukrainians

of all ages have come to receive Christ. They have seen how people cry when they receive Jesus. We have seen God's hand in opening new churches."

According to Ken Rhodes, missions mobilization director for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, more than 850 volunteers went to Ukraine during the partnership, working in 100 villages and personally helping start 40 churches or missions. Mississippi Baptists directed Vacation Bible Schools, sports clinics, medical/dental and eyeglass missions, and women's ministry, to name just a few.

"The initial goal of the partnership was the beginning of one church in (each of) nine strategic areas of the Odessa oblast (state). Those nine churches were started and they became hub churches for many new church planters throughout the villages in Odessa," Rhodes said.

"The greatest impact upon Ukraine has been the encouragement of Ukrainian believers to become involved in the work of sharing the Gospel and planting new churches. Mississippi Baptists have formed strong relationships with Ukrainian Baptists and walked alongside in equipping Ukrainians for the work," Rhodes pointed out.

History has shown that when people are finally freed from the yoke of totalitarianism, among the first liberties they embrace is the gathering together of themselves for the purpose of worshipping in freedom. That surely must inflame the Devil.

"I'M GLAD I HAVE A NEW HEART—MY OLD ONE COULDN'T TAKE THIS!"



Let us therefore heed Kommendant's call for prayer, as the proud people of Ukraine move steadily toward their Christian future. "At the beginning of our partnership, we knew there were thirty villages that didn't even have a church," Shemchishen said. "Then you came and shared the Gospel, and now each of those villages has at least one church, sometimes two or three."

May God continue to bless Ukrainian believers, and may God continue to bless the efforts of Mississippi Baptists to share the Light in this exceedingly dark world.

There are certain things that we believe as Baptists — the doctrinal distinctives that define us. Among them are these three: the primacy of the Bible as our only rule for faith and practice; the independence and autonomy of the local church; and the priesthood of every believer. These three are interrelated.

Because of these three doctrines, we do church differently than other denominations. We believe that each Christian has a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ without the help of a church or a priest. That relationship is governed by His Holy Word and lead by the Holy Spirit. We believe the local church is a group of born-again believers brought together by divine providence, governed by His Holy Word, and led by the Holy Spirit. Thus, any denominational affiliation a church has must respect these realities.

For example, the church I pastor is a Southern Baptist Church. That is a statement of identity, but it is also an understatement. In reality we are an independent, autonomous church that chooses to relate to the Lauderdale Baptist Association, the Mississippi Baptist Convention, and the

GUEST OPINION:



Our doctrinal distinctives

By Carl M. White, pastor
Highland Church, Meridian

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The governing principle of how our church, other churches, and these denominational groups relate is called Organizational Autonomy.

In our denominational life we have seen incredible changes over the past decade. The Sunday School Board is now LifeWay Christian Resources; the Foreign Mission Board is now the International Mission Board; the Home Mission Board is now the North American Mission Board; and the Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission no longer exist. Just a decade or so ago, Southern Baptists had six theological seminaries. Now, there are a half a dozen new seminaries and divinity schools, often affiliated with a state-supported Baptist college or university.

These facts are well known. Not as well known is the fact that some state Baptist schools, hospitals, and other entities have changed the way they elect trustee boards. Instead of accepting nominees from the state Baptist conventions, some boards now appoint some or all of their own members. This has led to dissension and division in some states.

In order to prevent such issues on the national level, the SBC Executive asked the boards of trustees of all our SBC entities to amend their charters (the legal document that governs how they operate) and name the SBC Executive Committee as the "sole member." That designation means that in the future a trustee board cannot amend their charter without the expressed permission of the

sole member. It means the institution is hard-wired to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Most people did not realize that our institutions were not already hard-wired to the convention. Most people did not know that boards of trustees of each institution had total control. People didn't realize it because the system worked. The system worked because there was a level of trust that held everything together. That level of trust is badly shaken, in some cases gone and the system is struggling.

New Orleans Seminary trustees have expressed grave concerns about changing their charter to make the SBC the sole member. Seminary President Chuck Kelley insists that Baptist heritage and tradition is against this kind of connectionalism. He is saying that the board of trustees of New Orleans Seminary should be trusted to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit and do what is right for that school. He is standing for the principle of Organizational Autonomy.

I think Kelley is right. I also think he will lose this fight. That means as a denomination we have made a change that goes much deeper than a name or mission statement. We have altered a founding principle.

Canada moves closer to same-sex unions

OTTAWA, Ontario (BP) — Canada may become the third country to legalize same-sex marriage after its Supreme Court ruled Dec. 9 that Parliament has the authority to change the nation's marriage laws.

Same-sex marriage already is legal in five of the 10 provinces and in one territory, but the federal government — ruled by the Liberal Party — is moving to legalize it nationwide.

In the summer of 2003, the Liberals drew up a bill and sent a list of questions to the high court, asking if the federal government had the authority to legalize same-sex "marriage." The court heard arguments in October and issued its landmark decision Dec. 9. The ruling in essence is an advisory opinion.

Parliament will now debate the bill, which redefines marriage to mean the "lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others."

"Several centuries ago it would have been understood that marriage should be available only to opposite-sex couples," the court wrote. "The recognition of same-sex marriage in several Canadian jurisdictions as well as two European countries belies the assertion that the same is true today."

Canada would join Belgium and the Netherlands as the only three countries to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide. It is also legal in the U.S. state of Massachusetts.

Supporters of the bill praised the decision, while conservatives and traditionalists clung to hope that it still could be defeated. The Canadian Department of Justice issued a statement saying that the bill will be introduced in the House of Commons "as soon as possible" in late January. It will be a "free vote" — meaning that each member of Parliament can vote his or her conscience and will not be required to follow the party line.

"In making this decision, the Court has clearly indicated that access to civil marriage is a mat-



ter of fundamental equality," the Department of Justice statement read. "... Now that the Court's decision has brought clarity to this issue, the government will respond quickly and decisively to introduce a bill which will respect and defend the Charter rights of all Canadians."

Conservatives, though, found some hope in the ruling. Janet Epp Buckingham, director of law and public policy for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, noted that the court declined to answer one of the four questions it was presented.

"The Supreme Court refused to rule on whether marriage must be redefined. They said that the federal government may redefine it," Buckingham told Baptist Press, drawing a distinction between "must" and "may."

"... They have pushed the issue back into the political arena," she said.

The fourth question asked if the "the opposite-sex requirement for marriage for civil purposes" was "consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms" — the Canadian version of the Bill of Rights. The court, though, declined to answer.

"They refused on the fourth question, which was essentially, 'Does marriage have to be redefined?'" Buckingham said.

"We think it's a positive thing, that they're sending this back to Parliament to make a ruling on. There has not been a political debate on this issue. It's been kept out of political debate."

The vote in Parliament could be close. In 2003 a non-binding motion defending the traditional definition of marriage was narrowly defeated in Parliament, 137-132. Approximately 50 members of the Liberal Party voted for the motion, and around 30 members of Parliament did not vote at all.

There has since been an election, muddying any headcount.

"We don't have a voting record for [new members]," Buckingham said, "but among those we do have a voting record for, it's very, very close. Until it's a done deal, there's still hope."

One Liberal member of Parliament was vocal about his opinion. "I do personally have a problem with redefining marriage and I'm sure some of my colleagues do as well," Liberal lawmaker Roy Cullen told the Associated Press.

The Canadian Supreme Court did rule that religious freedoms would be protected if same-sex "marriage" is legalized, but how far that would extend remains to be seen. For instance, could a civil official who presides at weddings be able to refuse to perform a same-sex "marriage"? The court did not say.

"Absent unique circumstances with respect to which the Court will not speculate," the court wrote, "the guarantee of religious freedom ... is broad enough to protect religious officials from

being compelled by the state to perform civil or religious same-sex marriages that are contrary to their religious beliefs."

Buckingham was cautious about the court's opinion on religious freedom. "We're very pleased to see them make that kind of strong endorsement for religious freedom, but they said that it is not up to the federal government to protect religious freedom; it's up to the provincial governments," she said. "Under our constitution, marriage is a federal responsibility but solemnization of marriage is a provincial responsibility."

Conservatives will have to work to ensure that religious freedoms are protected, she said.

"What we're going to be doing is calling on the provincial governments to protect the religious freedom in legislation,"

THE BAPTIST RECORD

she said. "It's not sufficient just to have an advisory opinion from the Supreme Court endorsing religious freedom. We need to see this in legislation."

The issue of same-sex marriage has highlighted a deep cultural divide between Canada and the United States. Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin, a Liberal, supports gay marriage. American President George W. Bush opposes legalization and backs an amendment to the U.S. Constitution banning same-sex marriage.

Polls show that Canadians are split on the issue of same-sex marriage. In the United States, polls show that Americans oppose it by a margin of two to one, but the two countries do share at least one trait — the role of courts in the "gay marriage" movement.

In Canada, homosexual activists have sued in six jurisdictions — including the aforementioned five provinces — and won every time. In the U.S., a court ruling forced Massachusetts to legalize same-sex marriage.

For more information about the debate over same-sex "marriage," visit <http://www.bpnews.net/samesexmarriage>.



THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

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No BR issue on Dec. 30

Due to postal regulations, the limit The Baptist Record issues per year, the December issue will not publish on December 30. All news items for publication in the issue of January 3 must arrive by the deadline line of the close of business on Wednesday, December 22. Please refer to the bottom page six for details on sending news items to The Baptist Record. For more information on the special deadline, contact William Perkins at (601) 322-3218 or toll-free outside the U.S. at (800) 748-1651. e-mail: wperkins@baptistpress.com

Hispanics on rise

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Hispanics are becoming a more influential market, with the 2000 U.S. Census reporting that the American Hispanic population rose 58% during the 1990s to 35.3 million. As their numbers have grown, so have the number of Hispanic churches. Based on figures from 2000 (the last available), the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board estimates there are almost 2,800 Hispanic churches and church-type missions across the country. LifeWay has responded with Spanish-language curriculum and discipleship resources, offering more than 50 product lines. These include age-graded Sunday School curricula, Beth Moore studies, "Experiencing God" resources, Vacation Bible School literature and a variety of music — all available in the United States at www.lifeway.com or by calling LifeWay at (800) 458-2772. The number of Internet-savvy Hispanics is growing as well, with nearly 53% of Hispanics browsing the Web for more than three years. Another 22% have been online for two to three years, and the number keeps growing. Thus LifeWay has developed a Spanish-language website — www.lifeway.com/spanish. "It's a critical ministry area for LifeWay," said David Hargrove, an Internet producer at LifeWay. "We're enthusiastic about helping create a ministry area that breaks new ground and has the potential to meet a need that no one else is meeting right now."

Looking back

10 years ago

For the first time, all top 10 positions on the Bible bestsellers list are captured by one translation — the New International Version, selling nearly 100 million copies since 1973 after surpassing the King James Version in 1986.

20 years ago

A 38-member special committee is appointed to craft a campaign for a \$40 million endowment to benefit the Mississippi Baptist Convention's three educational institutions and the Baptist Children's Village.

30 years ago

In a special worship service at First Church, Eupora, the congregation celebrates the elimination of debt on its beautiful church building, which was constructed in 1949. Valued at \$150,000, total cost was only \$112,000.



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1. Lord, I admit that
I need you.
(I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for
my sins and freedom
from eternal death.
(I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and
rose from the grave to
forgive my sins and to restore
my relationship with you.
(I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus
Christ into my life. From this
time on, I want to live in a
loving relationship with Him.
(I receive Christ as my
Savior and Lord.)

But as many as received him, to
them he gave the right to
become children of God, even to
those who believe in his name
(John 1:12).

If you make a decision for
Jesus Christ today, contact
a local Baptist church for
spiritual guidance.

STANDING IN LINE

It was getting close to Christmas and I was in a store purchasing a gift for someone for Christmas. I found what I was looking for and joined a long line of shoppers at the checkout counter. Within minutes there were a number of people standing behind me and so I felt better because I was not the last one in the line. Still, there I was standing in line. Have you ever thought about how many lines you have to stand in? It seems everywhere I go there is a line and I have no choice but to step up there and wait my turn. I have even wondered if there is some kind of time management record that heaven is keeping so that when you get there you can check and see how many hours, days, or years you stood in line waiting to get something, to do something, or to have something done to you. Well, it was getting close to Christmas and I understood that everybody else was in a rush and I just stood there in the checkout line. The longer I stood there the more I wondered if I wanted to get the gift or not, but I knew I needed to do so. I even thought to myself if I were getting something for me I would forget waiting and be out of here, but I just kept on waiting. I knew what time it was and periodically I would look at my watch again. It was getting close to thirty minutes that I stood in the line waiting to checkout. The people who were standing around me and who had also waited about thirty minutes didn't seem to be grumbling and griping too much, so I sure was not going to start. Finally, the lady in front of me was next to check out. A sense of joy and exhilaration overcame me as I waited for her to proceed, but then the strangest thing happened. She walked up to the checkout counter, laid the few items that she was going to purchase on the counter, and then said to the lady at the cash register, "Honey, I have decided not to get these things." She laid them down gently, said it with such a sweet voice, and even patted the merchandise as though it were her pet. With that she moved on through the checkout area and out through the door of the store.

I wondered what in the world was this lady thinking or doing. She had been standing there for a half an hour waiting to tell the lady that she had decided not to get the merchandise. I was shocked! I tried to figure out what must be going on. At first I thought this must be a wonderful Christian lady who during her quiet time that morning read a devotion on patience and just to test her patience she decided to go to the store, get some merchandise, stand in line, and see if she could keep her



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

patience warmed up and alive while just standing there waiting and letting patience have its perfect work. Just like mine, her patience was about to kick into overdrive.

Then I dismissed that thought. Surely nobody would actually do something like that to push his patience to the wall. Then I wondered. Maybe she is an angel, and all of those folks in front of me are angels sent here by God to stand in front of me and see how my patience holds out. If enough angels came to stand in the checkout line, would my cheery Christmas spirit diminish or die right there in front of everybody? Does God at times allow His angels to come and get around us and just kind of nudge us to the limits to see if our sweet Sunday morning Sunday School spirits hold out during the week? Then on reflection I begin to think that in my opinion she really didn't look like an angel. She was sweet and nice, but I didn't know if she was heavenly. That is probably not the reason she was there or did what she did.

In my bewilderment I stumbled upon a thought about maybe what actually was taking place. Could it be that this lady enjoys standing in line? Is it possible that there are people who go to stores, gather up merchandise, and stand in the line because they get a charge out of it? They just enjoy it. I can just hear some of you say, "Well, that is absurd!" Listen: there are people who enjoy doing all kind of weird things. I know some folks who enjoy going and sitting in uncomfortable stands in hot weather to watch cars go around a circle really fast. In fact, they say NASCAR is the fastest growing sport in America. People enjoy it.

Have you ever seen on television that strange sport where someone takes a large, heavy stone and gently shoves it down a strip of ice while his partner down at the other end has a kind of a squeegee mop that he either works back and forth

really fast or does nothing in order to slow or speed up the progress of the rock. I am here to tell you I have a friend who loves to participate in that sport.

I watch in amazement as the Polar Bear Club of Chicago or New York gather together at the first of the year and these usually bright and most of the time gifted people go running off into the icy waters of Lake Michigan or the cold waters of the North Atlantic. I get chill bumps just seeing it. So maybe what this lady likes to do is to go into a store, pick up two or three items, and stand and wait. Then after considerable time she can say to the cashier, "I was just waiting but I really don't want to purchase this."

Actually, what drove me to think that was that I have known people with a similar kind of approach to life in a different area. I am talking about church people who come to church all the time and they sit and do nothing. They even stand to sing a hymn or a chorus and they do nothing. There are mission trips that they do not want to go on, opportunities of ministry in which they would prefer not to participate, and needs in the lives of people around them to which they do not respond. They just wait until next week and come back and do it all again. They stand in line for no reason.

That may be you, and if it is I need to tell you that God has so much more for you. He wants to bless you, use you, and engage you in His service in a way that it will bring glory to His name and blessings to your life. Why not determine today to get in that line to say to the Lord Jesus, "Here am I send me."

The author may be contacted at
P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-
0530. E-mail: jfutral@mbcb.org.

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JUST FOR THE RECORD

Williamsburg Church, Collins, will present The Gift, a dramatic musical, December 17 and 18 at 7 p.m. For directions, call (601) 765-6536. Dennis Campbell is pastor.

Grays Creek Church, Hernando, will present their Christmas pageant December 19 at 11 a.m. All are invited to attend.

Puckett Church, Puckett, will hold a weekend of celebration, dedication, and consecration as they move into their new building. Festivities begin January 15 at 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., and the morning of January 16 with dinner and entertainment following. To participate, call (601) 825-5857.

Fernwood Church, Gulfport, will hold Christmas in the City December 19 at 6 p.m. with various nationalities singing including Spanish. Jim Kultau is pastor.

Immanuel Church, Cleveland, will host a reception honoring retiring pastor Tommy Arinder December 19 from 3 - 4:30 p.m. All are invited.

Briar Hill Church, Florence, will hold a New Year's Eve gospel singing December 31 at 7:30 p.m. featuring David Patillo, Harmony and Grits, The Gospel Echoes, and The Revelations. For more information, call (601) 845-6843, (601) 720-8870, or (601) 906-0671.

Woodland Hills Church, Jackson, will present Ginny Owens, Jackson native, in concert January 6 at 6:30 p.m. Also performing are Lauren Johnson, Jackson, and Wesley Stebeck, Natchez. Tickets are \$7 and are offered at Lifeway and the church office. Tickets at the door are \$10.

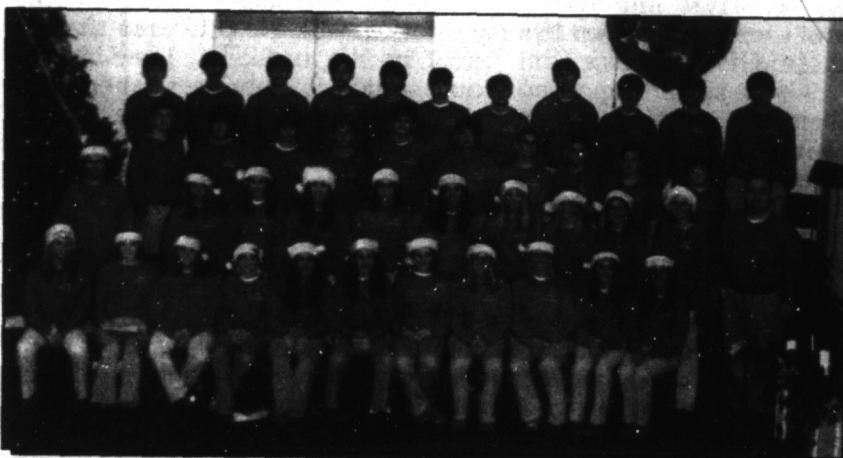
Second Church, Kosciusko, held revival services November 14-17. A total of 46 decisions, 21 for salvation and 25 rededications, were made. Twelve were baptized November 21.

Jasper County Association received two new churches, New Beginnings Church, Stringer, October 18, and Liberty Church, Stringer, October 19, at their annual meeting. Randy McHan is pastor of New Beginnings, Mike

Anderson is pastor of Liberty, and Harvey Lilly is the AMD.

The youth of **Clarke-Venable Church,** Decatur, presented a Christmas musical, *Laughing All the Way*, December 5. It was directed by Alex Craft, minister of music. Pictured are the youth.

Bartahatchie Church, Caledonia, recently held Judgement, a walk-thru drama featuring decisions for eternity. Attending were 190 people with 14 professions of faith and 30 rededications. Pictured is the group that helped present the program.

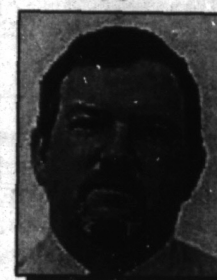


Youth of Clarke Venable Church, Decatur



Barahatchie Church, Caledonia

Staff changes



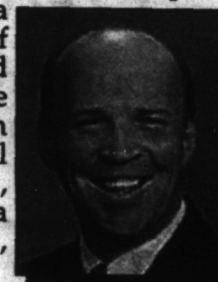
Carver attended NOBTS and is from Greenwood.

Jim Alford has been called as interim pastor of Valley Grove Church, Pontotoc Association.

Fellowship Church, Ellisville, called **Eudell Hill** as interim pastor in October. All are invited to attend worship services Sundays at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m., and Wednesdays at 7 p.m.

Jerry Nance has been called as pastor of Grace Memorial Church, Gulfport.

Nance is a graduate of MC and NOBTS. He comes from Central Church, Olympia Fields, Illinois.

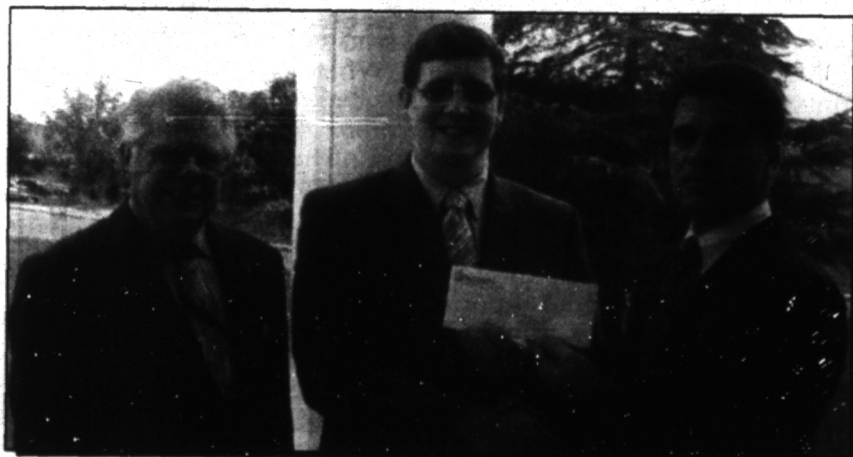


Nance

COLLEGE NEWS

Pictured (from left) are Hardy R. Denham, William Carey College student Joe Marsh of Corinth, and Daniel Caldwell, vice president of church relations and a member of the Board of Ministerial

Education, during a recent check presentation. Marsh was awarded the Hardy R. Denham, Jr. Scholarship by the Board of Ministerial Education, an agency of the MBCB.



Denham, Marsh, and Caldwell

OBITUARY

The Rev. J. Millard Purl Sr., 87, McComb, died November 15 in Hollis Okla.

Visitation was held November 19 and 20 at Hartman Funeral Home, McComb. Services were held November 20 at First Church, McComb, with Robert Westbrook, Billy Ray Simmons, and Victor Walsh officiating. Burial followed at Magnolia Cemetery with military honors.

He was known to many as "Brother Purl" and served as a Baptist pastor for over 56

years. He was ordained in 1948 at Union Church, Magnolia. He was a graduate of Mississippi College.

Purl and his wife, Velma, served Baptist churches in Southwest Mississippi for over 50 years including Moak's Creek, Lincoln County; Mt. Olive, Smithdale; Galilee, Gloster; and Hebron, Amite County.

Purl served with the 8th Infantry Division in World War II. He was awarded five battle stars including the Normandy Invasion, the battle of the

Hurtgen Forest, and the Ruhr pocket. He was also awarded the Bronze Star which reads "for meritorious achievement in ground combat against the armed enemy."

He was known as an avid bird hunter. He passed away while on a quail hunt in Oklahoma.

Survivors include his daughter, Millie Olcott; son, John M. Purl; four grandchildren; sister, Mary Jane Lenoir; brother, D.L. Purl; and many nieces and nephews.

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FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

Praise Jesus, Our Savior

Luke 2:8-20

By Frances C. Graham

The announcement of the arrival of Jesus' birth did not make the headlines of the Bethlehem Gazette. Instead, the glorious event was heralded by heaven itself. Angels proclaimed the Savior's birth and actually sang the very first Christian anthem dedicated to praising Him.

The audience chosen to hear the news of the Savior's birth was not priests but shepherds who watched over their flocks in the outlying hills of Bethlehem. Shepherding was not a glorious occupation but it certainly exemplified the role of caring for innocent animals which could not care for themselves. For you see, shepherds constantly count the sheep in the fold (Jer. 33:12-13) and carry

the injured and weak on their shoulders (Isa. 40:11). The care a shepherd gives to their flock is similar to the love and care that a Savior brings to those who believe in Him.

Now since the shepherds were on the job, they were awake when the heavens opened and therefore would never accept someone telling them that they were dreaming. They were surprised though when the angel stood before them to make the announcement from God of the birth of Jesus. They also were frightened by the glory of the Lord around them because the dark night became very bright even with more light than in the daytime.

The first words spoken by the angels were to not be afraid. That was followed by "I pro-



Graham

claim to you good news (gospel) of great joy." (HCSB, Luke 2:10) Joy, a natural result of good news, is an inward feeling that often is exhibited outwardly by rejoicing and praise.

God provided a reason for joy for everyone not just the angels but for all the people.

(Isa. 9:3). He provided that joy in the unlikely stable, in the fields where shepherds watched their flocks, in an infant that would be the Savior.

Now the angels, far beyond the number the shepherds could ever count, gathered with the shepherds as the audience to praise God for His glory and the peace that He was providing to His people on this earth.

When the angels left, there was no question in the minds of the shepherds as to what to do. They did not need to quibble. They needed to respond. They had to go to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus.

Upon arrival at the stable,

they looked into the face of the baby lying in a manger. They were thankful that God had chosen them to be a witness for the event. But as a witness, their role did not stop there. They were to go and tell the story to everyone they met.

The story they told included how the angel came announcing the news with glory of the Lord, how the heavenly hosts sang songs of praise to God, and how they themselves went to the stable to find the baby of God's glory. Their story did not stop there. They shared what they had been told about this baby. They told of His arrival, that He would bring great joy, and that He would be the Savior, the Messiah.

The shepherds became the first evangelist for Jesus. As they told their story, many people were surprised and wanted to know more. As the shepherds continued, it was no longer their story but it became the story for the world given to us by God Himself. God's mysterious surprise became

known throughout the land because no one could hide such a revelation.

The shepherds followed through with their role from the announcement of the birth to the trip to Bethlehem and then to the sharing of the news to all who would listen. They then returned to their flocks of sheep to continue their jobs but they would never be forgotten for their role in what God had done. They continued to sing a new song in their hearts, a song of praise for a Savior who would save not just the Jews but the Gentiles as well.

How different is their role from our own? Are we not to be tellers of the news but hearers only? Are we not to come to the Savior and view Him as the Lord of our lives? Are we not to rejoice over His coming and praise Him constantly? We have the Gift of Christmas. It is ours for the asking and then it is ours to share.

Graham is a member of Adaton Church, Starkville.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Responding to God's Leadership

Luke 1:26-38, 41-45

By Neil Gant

"It's the most wonderful time of the year" so the song goes. It is the Christmas season. Sometimes it is better described as the shopping season. Though the emphasis should be on giving, it seems to be on trying to get something bigger and better than last year. In all of the hustle of the season, we may miss the most important part of what we are celebrating. We may miss the Lord Jesus. At the time of the first Christmas, a young girl was visited by an angel and she received a startling announcement. What if Mary had said no? Even though she was the one chosen to be the instrument to bring the Lord Jesus into the world. What if she had refused to obey? She most definitely would have been lost to history.

Enough of the what if questions. She did obey. The new question that needs to be asked is, "Will we obey?" Let us learn from Mary to celebrate the Lord Jesus with obedient hearts.

LISTENING, LUKE 1:26-29

In verse 26, the sixth month refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. At that time Gabriel went to Nazareth to make an announcement to a young girl named Mary. She is described in two ways. First, she is a virgin. The clear emphasis is on her moral purity. Second, she is espoused or betrothed to Joseph. So strong was this agreement that it could only be broken through divorce. Gabriel tells Mary she is highly favored and blessed. The phrase literally means full



Gant

of grace. This points to Mary as having received grace from God (an indication from the words "the Lord is with you.") Mary is also described as blessed because she has been chosen by the Sovereign Lord to fulfill His purpose. Mary listened intently, even while being troubled at the saying. She had an uncertainty about everything that was happening. Let us do that which we know is right and by grace He will give us more light to do what may be uncertain.

LEARNING, LUKE 1:30-33

What Mary considered as uncertain, Gabriel made certain. He fully explained the purpose of God's choice of her, a young girl in Nazareth. Gabriel expressed words of comfort, "Do not be afraid." She had not need to fear because she had found favor with God. He then explained the miracle that was going to take place. Mary would con-

ceive and bring forth a Son. His name was to be Jesus. He would be unlike any other person ever born into this world. He would be great and called the Son of the Highest. He would receive the throne of David His father. He would be the ruler of a kingdom that would never end. This child to be called Jesus was no ordinary child. How clear the angel made the will of God for Mary and how awesome the privilege and task before her.

QUESTIONING, LUKE 1:34-37

Mary wondered about how this could take place. She had never had a physical relationship with a man. She could not fathom how a child could be born to her without that experience. Gabriel indicated that it would be miraculous. The Holy Spirit came upon her. Because of the miraculous nature of the conception, the one born would be called the Son of God. As an illustration of the power of God to do as He says, Gabriel told Mary of Elizabeth's pregnan-

cy. Gabriel closed with the affirmation that nothing is impossible with God.

SUBMITTING, LUKE 1:38

Mary submitted to the will of God for her with joy. Obedience is not merely an expression, but is rather a submission of the whole life to the will of God. This season of the year is a good time to reflect on our level of obedience from the past year and a time to look forward to a life of obedience for the next year.

AFFIRMING, LUKE 1:41-45

When Mary greeted Elizabeth, John leaped in her womb. A miraculous affirmation of the miraculous promise made to Mary by Gabriel. Elizabeth confirmed that blessing comes to those who obey. In this case it was Mary. She believed and the affirmation is that the things spoken will come to pass. Trust and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Gant is pastor of Pine Grove Church, Hickory Flat.

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News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permitted.

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Gifts of Honor and Memory

A portion of **The Village View** is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

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Mr. & Mrs. B. G. Johns
Mr. Thomas James King
Dr. & Mrs. Linuel D. Jayroe
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Cotton & Jackie Weatherbee
Bernard Weiss
Mrs. Bernard Weiss
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Mr. & Mrs. Rodis L. Wheeler
Mrs. Mary Wheeler
Dr. & Mrs. Linuel D. Jayroe
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Donna Taylor Williamson
Ms. Jean O'Brien
Joan Crawford Willis
Mrs. Wanda H. Fowler
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Harold G. Wilson
Mrs. Harold G. Wilson
Bobby Winter
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Mr. Donald A. Thompson
Galilee Baptist Church

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LOS WC QLZS MONE
NWCB, MONE PEM ZN
ZQ UZICO NE XOER NWC
BPQNCHP EV NWC
XZOUSEB EV UES: DMN
MONE NWCB NWLN LHC
RZNWEMN, LAA NWQC
NWZOUQ LHC SEOC ZO
GLHLDACQ.

BLHX VEMH: CACICO

Clue: U = G

Have fun with cryptography
and exercise your Bible
knowledge. A King James
Version Bible verse has been
encoded by letter substitution.
The same letter is substituted
throughout the puzzle. Solve
by trial and error. Answer to
last week's puzzle:
John 3:16

SHIFT GRIDLOCK

Workers in India change shifts at Infosys, the second largest "Electronic City" in the world behind Microsoft. More than 10,000 people work in two shifts on the campus, which involves 30 buildings on an estimated 260 acres. (BP photo by Matt Jones)

India sees changes after election surprise

DELHI (BP) — Pride goeth before a fall. India's ruling Hindu nationalists tasted the bitter truth of Solomon's warning earlier this year. Popular, confident and riding a wave of economic expansion, then-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee called early parliamentary elections. He fully expected the nationalist alliance dominated by his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to win.

He was wrong. The nation's voters, though overwhelmingly Hindu, soundly defeated the BJP alliance in an upset almost no one expected. The secular-minded Congress Party swept back into power, led by Sonia Gandhi (widow of slain Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, assassinated while campaigning for re-election in 1991).

Why the stunning election result — and why should Christians care? Political analysts say the main reason for Congress' victory was the anger millions of rural poor and low-caste members took to the polling stations. They rebelled against the whole idea of "India Shining" — the BJP slogan for the nation's rapid economic progress — in the face of ongoing poverty, corruption and inaction at the local level.

Now the pressure is on Congress Party leaders to help deliver prosperity to the villages. If they don't, they'll be the ones turned out next time. "It's a big warning for everybody," one top official was quoted as saying.

India's Muslims and Christians, however, hope to be major beneficiaries of the vote. "Justice has shined over the peoples in India," an elated Christian leader said after the defeat of the Hindu coalition, which had held power since 1998.

"Praise God Almighty for His mercy shown on us and prayer answered. Christians, Muslims and the poor have suffered [under BJP rule]. We lost lives, property, the right to worship and to proclaim the Gospel. Now is the time to praise our Savior and proclaim the Good News."

Both minorities have endured persecution by Hindu militants who believe "India is for Hindus." Thousands of Muslims



FUTURE UNCERTAIN — "India is for Hindus" is a saying reflecting centuries of religious tradition now marked by a touch of political and religious uncertainty after Hindu nationalists were upset by the secular-minded Congress Party in elections last spring. (BP photo by Matt Jones)

have died in anti-Islamic riots. Christians in several states have been vilified, attacked — and in some cases, killed — in dozens of incidents over the last decade.

India's 130 million-plus Muslims remain by far the biggest and most despised "enemy" for Hindu extremists. But Christians, at less than three percent of the population, present an easier target. And their evangelistic success — particularly among responsive low-caste Hindus, Dalits ("untouchables") and tribal peoples — infuriates the radicals, who contend Christians bribe the poor to convert. Some Hindu groups carry out regular campaigns to "reconvert" new Christians by force.

Christian leaders say the radicals' real agenda is an old one: to defend the economic status quo of the outlawed (but still

widespread) Hindu caste system, which relegates lower castes — the great majority of Indian Hindus — to servant status.

National BJP officials consistently downplayed or denied the involvement of radical Hindus in the persecution of Christians and Muslims. That may well have contributed to their election loss.

Christian persecution "will continue and perhaps increase" in states where Hindu fundamentalists still rule, cautioned Joseph D'Souza, president of the All India Christian Council, "but at the national level, we expect change. We expect the national government not to condone the harassment of minorities and the Dalits.... We expect religious freedom and the freedom to exercise all our spiritual and social rights."

India's modern young adults work hard, play hard

BANGALORE, India (BP) — While his American corporate client sleeps many time zones away, Allen works 12, 14, sometimes 16 hours a day. Whatever it takes to get the job done — on time and on target.

"He gives me work in the evening" via computer, says Allen, one of the tens of thousands of digital globetrotters in Bangalore, India's 24/7 capital of information technology (IT). "When he comes back in the morning it will be done, for a very low cost and with very high quality."

Allen, a 20-something college graduate, works for a major information technology company in Bangalore's "Electronic City," a mile-long stretch in the sprawling south Indian metropolis. There you can find sleek office complexes housing Oracle, Wipro, Intel, IBM, Dell, and Hewlett-Packard.

Allen's brother Finney, also a college grad, works on the most visually impressive IT "campus" in town: Infosys. Spread over 260 beautifully manicured acres, it reportedly trails only Microsoft's U.S. headquarters in sheer size. The

pristine complex features work stations for some 10,000 employees — plus a gym, recreation center, resort-style pool, palm trees, ponds with paddle boats, restaurants, convenience stores, and an open-air amphitheater for concerts.

"People who work here don't want to leave," says one proud staffer — but when each shift ends, long convoys of company shuttle buses wait to take throngs of educated, motivated workers home, making room for the next shift.

Infosys can afford the perk. The company reached \$1 billion in sales during the spring. It held a huge outdoor celebration on campus and handed out \$23 million in employee bonuses. "We're still partying," a company official said days after the bash.

See, the "Zippies" of India like to work hard — and play hard.

Who are the Zippies? "A young city or suburban resident, between 15-25 years of age, with a zip in the stride," explains Outlook, an Indian magazine. "Belongs to generation Z. Can be male or female, studying or working. Oozes attitude, ambition and aspiration. Cool, confident and creative. Seeks challenges, loves risks and shuns fears."

They are the first generation of Indians to benefit from modern economic globalization. Allen and Finney make more money fresh out of school than their well-educated father ever dreamed of making. Still, they command only a tenth of comparative American salaries.

When it comes to spiritual things, many Zippies are living on bread and water — just like many "multi-tasking" Americans. Shift times change frequently. Pressure mounts. Competition stalks.

"They make themselves so busy that there is no time," says Allen, who is a Christian. "You go to work and after that shopping, and after shopping you get ready for tomorrow's presentation. It's so packed that you don't have time to think about someone up above taking care of you. They believe in 'Me alone. I don't need anybody's help.'"

Even all-important family ties are fraying. Indian parents traditionally exert huge influence on their adult children's decisions — education, career, marriage. That still applies to the Zippies. But the challenges and temptations of city life can be overwhelming — particularly for someone from a village family experiencing freedom and disposable income for the first time. Young men start looking for thrills. Young women trade modest saris for tight jeans.

For a generation leaping from rigid Hindu tradition to moral chaos, there's only one answer, according to Rachel: "The Lord is my God. He's the only one. I just know that the answer is Jesus."

Getting that message to India's up-and-comers ought to be a priority for Christians with a heart for this vast nation. By Outlook's estimate, six out of every 10 Indian households have at least one Zippie.